

# Green Living



# Save Some Green Going Green

Keep money in your wallet with environmentally focused living.

Earth-friendly choices can help make this world a healthier place to live, but there's a financial angle too.

Investing in a sustainable lifestyle can actually lower your bills, while giving our lives a sense of purpose in the face of rising pollution, waste and climate worries. One estimate from the Center for Sustainable Systems said families can save as much as \$1,560 a year by making smart choices. Here's how.

## LIGHTBULBS

Switch to LED at home. These lightbulbs use as much as 75% less energy — and they last roughly 25 times longer, according to the U.S. Department of Energy. That can add up to \$75 in savings on your monthly utility bill, according to the Consumer Federation of America, even if you only switch five most used lightbulbs to LEDs that are Energy Star-certified. On a larger scale, the Energy Department estimates that some \$30 million will be saved cumulatively by 2027.

## UNPLUGGING

It may surprise you how much energy is wasted when electronic devices are left in standby mode. In some cases, this accounts for up to 10% of household energy bills, aver-



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aging more than \$100 a year according to figures from the Center for Sustainable Systems.

## THERMOSTATS

You can save another 10% by turning the thermostat up 7 to 10 degrees from normal settings for the eight hours each day we're away at work, the U.S. Energy Department

reports. That may translate into more than \$100 annually, according to the Consumer Federation of America. And it's never been easier than with today's programmable thermostats.

## PLASTICS

Cutting down on plastics inevitably leads to reusing alternative choices like insu-

lated water bottles, metal straws, and cloth grocery bags. That adds up to savings when you're not re-purchasing and then tossing single-use plastic versions of the same items.

## WATER

Heating our water is one of the more expensive things we do every day, so try using

more cold water for dish washing and in the clothes washing machine. Using cold water just once a week when washing clothes can drastically reduce emissions, too. Consider a drying rack too, since the Sustainability Consortium reports that more than 70% of the electricity needed to complete a load of clothes is used by the dryer.

# Barreling Toward Conservation

There's actually a simple solution that partners with Mother Nature.

Outdoor barrels can harvest and collect rainfall to help mitigate our soaring water usage.

In fact, the EPA reports that the average U.S. family draws down 300 gallons of water a day, with outdoor activities accounting for some 30% of that usage. It's higher in drier areas of the country, and in places that boast water-intensive landscape designs like resorts and golf courses. More arid states in the American west boast the highest per-capita usage. For residents elsewhere, however, naturally occurring snow and rain showers provide an easy opportunity to conserve water.

## HOW THEY WORK

Outdoor barrels can store hundreds of gallons of water per year, offering homeowners the chance to reduce their reliance on municipal water systems and broaden their self-reliance. That leads to a positive impact on the environment and your bottom line, since your water bill will inevitably be positively impacted. This stored water from storm runoff can then be used for watering gardens and lawns, home maintenance and washing cars. Just remember that the Environmental Protection Agency warns against using water from these barrels for drinking, since it's



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so difficult to avoid outdoor contamination.

## SIMPLE INSTALLATION

The tanks are typically inexpensive to purchase and they're easy to install. Simply connect them to a downspout in your gutter system, or place the barrel under a drip edge or other place where rainwater naturally runs off the

home. Professional assistance is not typically needed. The barrels will then collect rain in the summer and snow melt in the winter as it travels off your rooftop. Some barrels even come specially equipped with a hookup for a hose at the bottom, making water transfer a breeze. Consider a submersible electric pump if gravity doesn't provide suffi-

cient water pressure.

## SAVING WATER

There are a range of other recommendations to consider beyond capturing and reusing rainwater. Water-saving attachments are now widely available for showers and faucets, where most of our usage takes place. Leaks and underperforming systems also lead

to waste. Consider having your home inspected by a professional who's versed in water conservation. If every U.S. household were to take part in these water-saving initiatives, the U.S. Geological Society estimates that usage would fall by some 30%. That's an astounding 5.4 billion gallons a day, with an annual savings in excess of \$4 billion.

# Don't Forget About E-Waste

Don't stop at recycling paper, glass and plastic in the office.

Phones break, computers become obsolete and televisions start to seem too small. What happens next can have huge implications.

If you simply throw your old electronics away, they'll head to a local landfill or may instead be incinerated. In either case, this can have a major environmental impact.

## DEFINING E-WASTE

E-waste is a growing concern in an ever-more connected world, since it's been tied to dangerous forms of water and air pollution. This waste is defined as any device that is discarded, broken or otherwise at the end of its usefulness. Included are cell phones, laptops, computers, televisions, scanners, printers and smaller electrical devices like music players or game machines.

Experts estimate that some 50 million tons of e-waste is produced annually in the U.S. alone, according to EarthDay.org. Unfortunately, those numbers are expected to grow, in many cases because tech companies are shortening the life of these devices. New laptops don't work with old cables, smartphone batteries stop holding charges, and software updates aren't compatible with older devices.



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## KNOW THE DANGERS

Materials inside of our electronic devices and their batteries are extremely damaging to our environment, including lead, cadmium and mercury. These chemicals may leach out at landfills during rain storms, leading to health problems in people and animals who use nearby waterways. These materials may also be released into the air

when the devices are burned with other trash, causing serious respiratory issues for those who inhale the fumes. States like California have declared old cathode ray tubes from TVs and computer monitors to be hazardous.

## RECOMMENDED DISPOSAL

As with so many environmental initiatives, those with electronic devices are encour-

aged to “reduce, reuse and recycle.” Reduce e-waste through maintenance rather than constant updating. Reuse by donating or selling your old device instead of throwing it away. When all else fails, recycle if the device can't be repaired. It's recommended that you take e-waste to municipal collection points, which typically have a specially designated area for recycling e-waste.

But what if you live in a state that doesn't ban tossing out electronics with every-day trash? You may have to seek out alternative options. Community clean up days have begun springing up all over the country. E-waste programs have also been established by retailers, environmental groups and recycling centers. Look for searchable online lists of nearby service providers.

# Going Green in The Kitchen

Thoughtful changes can help you go green while cooking those greens.

Big dividends can follow updates to your equipment, your purchasing habits and even the water used to rinse rice.

Daily kitchen routines become ingrained over time, as recipes, pots and pans are handed down. But the past can't always account for future innovation. It's easier than ever to make small adjustments that will help out the planet in a big way. You'll save money too.

## GENERAL TIPS

Switch to reusable sponges or dish towels instead of paper products. Aluminum foil can be cleaned in the dishwasher and reused. Turn the faucet off when hand washing dishes. Put a lid on a pot, and it will require less energy to boil. Save water after rinsing your rice for house plants. The added starch encourages healthy bacteria to grow. And forget the plastic bags at the market. Most produce can go right into your cart, since it will be washed or peeled once you get home anyway.

## APPLIANCES

Look for the Energy Star label when it's time to purchase a new refrigerator, freezer or dishwasher. This logo signifies that the products meet and exceed demanding standards for



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energy efficiency that are federally mandated. Qualified refrigerators, for instance, are 20% more efficient than typical models, according to Energy.gov. That can lead to big savings in the long run.

## UPDATE YOUR COOKING

Our stoves use lots of energy, some of which is wasted.

Consider saving time and money by placing your food in the oven immediately, rather than pre-heating for 10 to 15 minutes. You can also turn the oven off as much as 10 minutes early to let residual heat complete the cooking process. Microwaving food is also a huge money saver. Energy Star estimates that energy

usage falls by as much as 80% when using a microwave instead of the oven.

## CLEANING UP

Cleaners often rely on chemicals that can be harmful to people and the planet. A range of new alternatives offer plant-based solutions for dishwashing, surface cleaning and

detergents that are safer to touch, breathe and release into the world. If you're a handy person, you might even consider making your own. DIY mixtures using ingredients found around the house like baking soda and vinegar can be transformed into non-toxic all-purpose cleaning supplies.

# What We Throw Away

Litter is harmful and costly, with an \$11 billion annual U.S. cleanup bill.

Keep America Beautiful estimates that more than 50 million pieces of trash end up along U.S. road and waterways.

That's actually down from statistics gathered in earlier years, but still represents a huge environmental challenge. This hurricane of trash is unsightly, it lowers property values and ultimately it does real damage to the world around us.

## INSIDE THE NUMBERS

Of those 50 billion pieces of litter, Keep America Beautiful said 26 billion pieces were along the nation's waterways. Trash can harm wildlife, sicken fish, allow contaminants to enter the food supply, and clog drainage pipes that help stop flash flooding. There were more than 2,000 instances of litter per mile, when averaged out. An astounding 207 million COVID-era masks were found in 2020 alone.

Tobacco products make up the vast majority of litter, however, followed by paper products and plastic. Candy wrappers and snack bags remain among the most frequently found types of trash.

## MAIN OFFENDERS

Though cigarette butts remain the item that's most often thrown away, this litter is actually down nationally by



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some 70%. That's thanks in part to efforts like the Cigarette Litter Prevention Program, which has become America's largest initiative aimed at eliminating this unsightly issue. They've installed local chapters in more than 1,700 communities nationwide, immediately sparking a 50% drop in cigarette-butt litter over the first

four to six months. The focus is on ash receptacles, portable ashtrays and other awareness tools through a robust grant program. Still, huge challenges remain: In order to have a litter-free nation, Keep America Beautiful estimates that every American would have to pick up 152 pieces of litter simultaneously.

## HOW TO HELP

First, keep litter to yourself. Install a receptacle in your vehicle so you can properly dispose of trash later. Seek out volunteer groups who sponsor or participate in local clean-up efforts. Encourage your employer or civic organization to adopt a stretch of road, an intersec-

tion or a waterway so that it can be regularly cleaned. The Ocean Conservancy sponsors an international coastal cleanup event annually, but you don't have to wait for that special day. Walk the banks or strike out in a canoe or kayak to help control the flow of trash in rivers, lakes and streams.

# Saving Water in the Shower

Drastically reducing your usage can come down to a simple attachment.

Low-flow shower heads have been shown to save up to a 1,000 gallons per month for some families.

That's because older shower heads allow as much as 8 gallons a minute, while these updated models limit the flow to 2.5 gallons or less.

## BIG SAVINGS

Wasting water is terrible for the environment, in particular in the age of devastating droughts. But you're also sending money down the drain. Low-flow shower heads help homeowners reduce their monthly bills by limiting the amount of water released. And saving money doesn't mean giving up on luxury for those in search of an invigorating experience. Some options include special features like massages, rainfall or other patterns to help with stiff necks and sore muscles.

## SIMPLE INSTALLATION

Installing a low-flow shower head is one of the simplest, most straight-forward DIY projects in any home. You can buy low-flow options for as little as 10 bucks at home goods and hardware stores. Shower heads typically just screw on and off. Changing them out doesn't require any special tools, other than perhaps a wrench and a soft cloth to protect the finish



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during installation.

Shower heads nevertheless come with instructions should you run into trouble. You can also ask for advice at the local store. The whole process takes just a matter of minutes. Check for leaks after you're done, since slow drips can waste lots of water. You may need to add some caulking

around the threads to dry up this problem.

## OTHER SAVINGS

Another obvious way to save water is quite obvious: Shorten your time in the shower. Curate a short playlist for a fun shower that also includes a reminder of when it's time to get out. If every

American cut their time in the shower by just one minute, the Environmental Protection Agency estimates that savings would reach 165 billion gallons a year. (That translates to nearly 250,000 Olympic-sized swimming pools.)

Avoid baths, since on average they use as much as 50 gallons of water. Most showers

take a few moments to warm up, so consider placing a bucket in the shower to collect water for plants or home cleaning. "Navy-style" showering saves water by lathering up and applying shampoo and conditioners with the water off. You can also skip a day when washing your hair, or shower every other day.

# Going Green At the Office

Changes at work can help the planet, and your career.

If it's your company, you'll improve your own bottom line. If you're working for someone else, implementing these ideas might help you get a promotion.

Whether it's eliminating single-use elements of your work life, carpooling or just turning off your office lights as you leave, there are many small things you can do to make a big difference.

## REUSING

Materials like water bottles, notebook paper and coffee cups that are only used once can end up creating a lot of sometimes unnoticed expense. They also clog local landfills with more unneeded refuse. Bring reusable bottles and coffee cups, instead of running through plastic and Styrofoam alternatives. If it's in the budget, create reusable drinking options with the company logo affixed to the front. Try to go paperless when it's possible, using smartphones, tablets or laptops to take notes rather than paper. Print on both sides of paper, and switch to recycled options. Reuse previously printed materials for scrap paper, while making sure that everyone takes advantage of recycling bins in the workplace.

## TRANSPORTATION

Walk or ride a bike to work.



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You'll be helping the planet, while improving your exercise regimen. Try to take advantage of public transit, if possible. Your tax dollars are used when purchasing, operating and maintaining these buses and trains, so why not take advantage of the service? You can also discuss carpooling with workers who may live

nearby, or travel past your area of town on the way into the office. Timing, shared expenses, routes and other expectations should be worked out in advance. In the best circumstances everyone saves on gas, and there are fewer smog-emitting cars on the road. You might even get to work faster if area highways

have a high-occupancy vehicle lane.

## SMART CHOICES

Choose energy-efficient products when it's time to replace office technology, including printers, break-room appliances and desktop computers. In some cases, more efficient laptops can

replace the large monitors associated with desktop models. Representatives with local electronics or office-goods stores may have additional tips for cutting down on energy usage. Be sure to turn off computers and lights as you leave for the day. Adjust the thermostat in order to save when the workplace is empty.